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# Introduction to new case studies of openness in and beyond the language classroom

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## 1. The project, six years on

Our previous edited volume, *Case studies of openness in the language classroom* (Beaven, Comas-Quinn, & Sawhill, 2013), was published in 2013 following the EUROCALL conference “Learning through Sharing: Open Resources, Open Practices, Open Communication” held the previous year in Bologna, Italy. At this event, we realised that the innovative work language practitioners were developing in their teaching had to be shared more widely. The edited volume we published showcased some of the ways in which language practitioners were engaging with the concept of openness and aimed to inspire and encourage teachers to experiment further with open resources and open practices. Five years on, we have decided to revisit our project, and to once more check the pulse of openness in and beyond the language classroom. Our purpose has remained unchanged: to give a voice to practitioners themselves, and bring to the surface some of the excellent and innovative work that language teachers and learners are engaged in.

In our previous volume, we took Open Educational Resources (OERs) to mean “materials used to support education that may be freely accessed, reused, modified and shared by anyone” (Downes, 2011, n.p.). UNESCO’s (2019) recently agreed definition of OERs continues to emphasise open licensing as the means to make content reusable and shareable:

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“Open Educational Resources are teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions” (UNESCO, 2019, n.p.).

There have been many definitions of open practice since our book was published, some more narrowly focussed on the use of OERs, others much broader, taking into account not only open resources but the affordances that openness makes available to teachers and learners (for a full discussion, see Cronin & McLaren, 2018). Weller’s (2017) broad definition of open educational practice as “any significant change in educational practice afforded by the open nature of the internet” (n.p.) seems to us a useful starting point for a pedagogy that adopts openness as a mindset and includes “freedom, justice, respect, openness as attitude or culture, the absence of barriers, promotion of sharing, accessibility, transparency, collaboration, agency, self-direction, personalization and ubiquitous ownership” (Baker, 2017, pp. 131-132).

Learners are increasingly accessing free online and open resources, tools, and spaces where they can develop their language skills beyond the classroom, alone, or in collaboration with others, and often whilst engaging in purposeful and enjoyable activities. Examples in the literature can be found for, amongst others, online gaming (Thorne, Black, & Sykes, 2009), fanfiction sites (Sauro, 2017), and mobile language learning apps (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). Rather than ignore these developments, teachers need to find ways to explore and connect these activities productively with the formal learning that they design for their students, as shown in many of the contributions in this volume.

## 2. Contents and audience

Like the previous volume, this collection is addressed primarily to foreign and second language teachers in secondary and tertiary education. We have maintained the same approach and kept to case studies as a more accessible

format for time-pressured educators. Authors were asked to provide sufficient context and detail about their projects to enable other practitioners to replicate or build upon the activities described in each case study. Whilst these are not research papers, the projects here included are often the result of pedagogical research, engagement with open education, and extensive experience of language learning and teaching.

The chapters in this volume have been divided into three sections: creating and using OERs, working in open spaces, and openness and teacher development. The following sections provide an overview of the contents of the book through brief summaries of each case study. We hope this will make it easier for readers to locate those projects that will be more relevant to them.

## 2.1. Creating and using OERs

This section opens with **Pio** and **Viana da Silva**'s description of the creation of an inclusionary open e-textbook for teaching Portuguese. Their understanding of 'openness' does not include only the fact that the textbook is freely available to anyone with access to the Internet, but also the bottom-up approach taken in the writing process, during which Portuguese speakers from different socioeconomic backgrounds in the United States and Brazil provided feedback. Thus, the representation of minority groups, leading for example to the use of masculine, feminine, and non-binary genders, became an integral part of the textbook.

**Durán Urrea** and **Meiners** come together to discuss OERs for a growing community in the United States: heritage learners of Spanish. Standard textbooks and teaching materials do not address the specific needs of students for whom Spanish is their home language but not always their main spoken or written language. The authors introduce a repository of OERs created for and by teachers of heritage Spanish as well as examples of how OERs can be used in a specific course.

**Berti** shares with us the development of an open online repository for storing, sharing and accessing virtual reality videos used as language teaching resources

in undergraduate beginner and intermediate Italian courses in the United States. Beyond describing this interesting way of incorporating OERs into Italian language courses, Berti shares suggestions for tools required to create additional videos.

In their action research study **Gabaudan** and **Nocchi** investigated the embedding of selected components of DigiLanguages, an OER for Digital Literacies for Foreign Languages, within a Bachelor of Arts in International Business and Languages at a higher education institution in Ireland. The aim of the two teachers and researchers was to identify affordances and constraints in the introduction and adaptation of a specific resource in their foreign language classroom, and to investigate the potential of the OER to change pedagogical practices in the area of digital literacies for foreign language learning.

In the last chapter of this initial section, **Mathieu**, **Murphy-Judy**, **Godwin-Jones**, **Middlebrooks**, and **Boykova** discuss a well-developed project consisting of a four-stage process and OER platform. Students are directly involved in curating authentic materials, creating interactive modules, developing interactive virtual exchanges with native speakers and finally creating OERs that exemplify communicative activities and which eventually become sustainable, relevant, and student-driven resources for language learning.

### 2.2. Working in open spaces

In the opening chapter to this section, **McAndrew** and **Campbell** describe a translation project for postgraduate translation students using Wikipedia. Students complete the translation of a Wikipedia article using Wikipedia's Content Translation tool, which enables them to focus on creating a high-quality translation without needing to worry about formatting issues. Through this, students obtain experience publishing their translation as a transition between their university education and the world of work.

Similarly, **Comas-Quinn** and **Fuertes Gutiérrez** illustrate their use of TED Translators, a project in which volunteers translate the subtitles of TED Talks, to

introduce translation and subtitling to advanced language students. In spite of the technical challenge and the unpredictability of working in an open community, participants found this activity enjoyable and appreciated the freedom to choose what they wanted to translate as well as the support provided by other students through peer reviews of their translation.

**Conde Gafaro** investigates the self-regulated learning strategies – in terms of goal setting, planning, monitoring, and adjusting strategies – that university students employ whilst engaging with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as part of an English for Academic Purposes course. She suggests that using MOOCs as supplementary material during a face-to-face academic English course can have positive effects on learning and boost self-regulation.

Twitter is the focus of **Kelly**'s case study. She explores this accessible environment for student interaction and engagement through a virtual ethnographic analysis of the tweets of language students in a distance education course. A sentiment analysis of the words used in the tweets reveals a generally positive feeling regarding their studies and the support provided by their teachers and peers.

**Beaven** outlines how open practices and tools are used in a postgraduate translation qualification. Students diagnose their own language development needs whilst learning about the open tools, resources, strategies, and learning communities available to the translating community. Students are introduced to ways of developing their language skills in both their main and other languages, whilst at the same time becoming aware of the key role of language development in their ongoing professional development as translators.

### **2.3. Openness and teacher development**

**Daniels** opens this section with a small-scale pilot study that sheds light on the open educational practices of freelance English language teachers in Switzerland within their continuing professional development. The author looks at open teaching practices and digital networking practices, and concludes that these open practices can lead to improved digital literacy as well as literacy and language skills.

**Meunier, Meurice, and Van de Vyver's** case study is set within a broader Belgian government project dedicated to language learning and teaching, and explores reading strategies outside the classroom for Dutch as a foreign language using a mobile hunt in the Hergé Museum (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium). The participants involved are pre-service teachers and primary-school pupils learning Dutch. The author discusses mobile and classroom open educational practices, the development of in-service teachers' and learners' digital literacy skills, and the creation of professional learning communities.

In the closing chapter, **Slimani-Rolls** discusses the potentially transformative impact of practitioner research, and more specifically exploratory practice, on the professional development of language teachers. Through a case study that looks at how a teacher addressed the issue of disruptive mobile-phone use in her classrooms, the author exemplifies this type of scholarship and urges teachers to engage in and make their research public, thus contributing to their own professional development as well as that of colleagues globally.

### 3. Final thoughts

We are grateful to the authors who shared their case studies with us, and by extension, with you, our readers. In an academic world that is becoming increasingly limited by costly textbooks and online paywalls, we are delighted to help celebrate the open and accessible work of our colleagues across the globe, and the opportunity this openness creates to learn from one another. We hope you will find, as did we, these case studies to be inspiring examples of best practice in open language learning and teaching, in and beyond the classroom.

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